

Montgomery In Focus

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Council Passes Reduced Budget

Today we unanimously approved a \$4.39 billion total operating budget for Fiscal Year 2010. The national recession along with a shortfall in both tax revenue and state aid made this one of the most challenging budgets in County history.

This year's budget is 0.3 percent lower than last year's amount, marking the first decrease in our budget in 18 years. The tax-supported portion of the budget is down \$14 million from last year and is \$8.4 million less than the County Executive's recommended budget.

There are no winners and losers in this budget—just tough decisions and hard-working employees trying to do more with less. We focused on protecting core services including education, public safety, public health and transportation. We also recognized the need to maintain and even enhance our safety net for those most affected by the troubled economy.

We understand that Montgomery County residents



We made the safety net a priority.

already are struggling with higher costs and flat or decreased income, so we chose not to exceed the County's Charter Limit on property tax and included a \$690 property tax credit for homeowners.

Although I was disappointed by many of the cuts we had to make, I am glad we were able to retain 18 Ride On bus routes that had been targeted for elimination or reduced service. Transit has a lot of benefits, like reducing congestion and mitigating climate change. But my most important consideration right now is that Ride On is the only transportation option for many of our residents. Fortunately, we've been able to make sure the most vulnerable of our residents continue to have the tools they need for their health, safety and productivity.

Fast Fact

If you aren't sure how to participate in land use decisions including special exceptions, variances, rezoning applications and subdivision or site plans, you aren't alone. The Office of the People's Counsel can help you understand the process so that you can present your case effectively in public hearings held by the Board of Appeals, the Office of Zoning and Administrative Hearings, and the Planning Board.

Green Tip of the Month

Farm fresh fruits, vegetables, bedding plants, cut flowers, preserves, herbs, baked goods and more are available at our local farmers markets. Each week, you'll find different products as they come into season. With foods this delicious, it is hard to believe they are good for you. Check the Department of Economic Development at www.montgomerycountymd.gov for a market near you.

Discussions on My Blog

"The cars of the near future will be lighter, more expensive and maybe smaller. Big engines will shrink. And more and more cars will be hybrids or diesel-powered vehicles like those common in Europe," according to a May 20 Washington Post article. Join the conversation on my blog at <https://nancyfloreen.blogspot.com>.

Disability Retirement Reform

We unanimously approved Bill 37-08 that reforms the County's Disability Retirement Law. With this action, we fully responded to the Inspector General's report showing that a much greater percentage of Montgomery County police officers are awarded disability retirement than are workers in similar positions in neighboring jurisdictions.

The bill was based on the tentative agreements negotiated by representatives of the County Executive and the Fraternal Order of Police. It makes reforms primarily focused on accountability--strengthening the Disability Review Panel and requiring independent medical examinations and annual re-checks for employees who retire on disability. I am confident that this will put to rest the concerns about the potential for fraud and abuse that the IG raised.

Although we discussed changing the level of benefits by implementing a two-tiered system, we took no action on it mainly because this particular issue always had been addressed through collective bargaining. The Council never has legislated the outcome of negotiations, and now isn't the time to start. Most importantly, there was no way to guarantee that proposed changes actually would save the taxpayers any money.

Nor was there any evidence to show that this was necessarily the only way to approach the issue of varying levels of police disability. In any event, we

got the commitment from our negotiating team that they will take up this issue in their next set of negotiations with the police. For details on the bill, visit my blog at <https://nancyfloreen.blogspot.com>.

Heavy Vehicle Parking Restrictions Start Soon

Starting on July 1, parking heavy commercial vehicles, buses and recreational vehicles on public roadways will be restricted in residential and agricultural zoned areas. We passed Bill 27-08 in January in response to the proliferation of heavy vehicles on many neighborhood streets. In many cases, these vehicles obstructed sightlines or created other safety hazards.

Since the ban only applies to residential and agricultural zones, heavy commercial vehicles may be parked on any public roadway where both sides of the street are zoned for industrial use. You also may park a heavy vehicle on private property such as your back yard or driveway, or a private storage facility. Restrictions apply only to large vehicles. Small commercial vehicles such as pick-up trucks are still permitted on all public roadways. Additionally, you may park your recreational vehicle on a public roadway for the purpose of loading/unloading for up to 18 hours.

If you have a vehicle illegally parked in your neighborhood, call the police non-emergency number (301-279-8000) for enforcement.



Parking restrictions begin July 1.

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